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Holocaust Memories of Felicia Weingarten Born Felicja (Lusia) Karo

I was born on April 12, 1926 in Łódź Poland, the youngest of three children born to Rachel-Miriam nee Pritzker and Moshe Karo. My sister Bella was born in 1917, my brother Josef, called Jozio, was born in 1922. He was killed in a streetcar accident on Rosh Hashanah in 1930. His tragic death threw a pall over the entire household. My mother was never the same again. Only many years later when my son Jeffrey died of cancer at age 31 did I full understand my mother's pain. Otherwise, I has a normal and good childhood.

My Father was in charge of the office and administration of a Jewish boys' private gymnasium from its inception till its closing by German authorities in 1939. The three gymnasium^{um} established by Dr. Marcus (Mordecai) Braude, consisted of two schools (elementary and high school for boys) and one for girls. The language of instruction was Polish but several Hebrew subjects were taught one to two hours every day. Final exams were taken both for secular and Hebrew subjects. The curriculum included Latin and English, instead of German, and was demanding but excellent. Although schools were not allowed any political ideologies, the Hebrew language, Jewish history and religion imbued the students with a love of the Jewish people and Zion, also a love for the Polish language including its poetry and history. These were happy years spent within a small loving circle of family, friends and classmates.

My Father, the oldest of eight children, had one sister and seven brothers, came to Lodz seeking a secular education. He paid for his tuition by tutoring since he was an excellent student. He returned to his hometown Gostynin only to visit his widowed mother and brothers. Grandfather Hirsch Karo was a poor rabbi. His wife, Mariam, was the daughter of a rabbi. It bothered grandfather that not on of his sons followed in his footsteps. I was was informed that

Josef Karo of the Shulhan Aruh was our ancestor. I have no proof of this illustrious ancestry only my father's words.

My Father was a very intelligent, educated and personable man. We all loved and respected him greatly. He was well thought of by all who came in contact with him. He was an ardent Zioni Klali (General Zionist) who gave of his time, effort and money to the Zionist cause. All his free time was spent serving the community. There was hardly any Jewish organization or cause that he didn't participate in, although no leftist or communist ones. As busy as he was he found time to help me with my math, which was my Achilles Heel, and to take me to movies.

Mother was born in the Ukraine and came to Poland with her divorced mother at the age of ten. Grandmother Chaya remarried and her husband Beryl Wassag loved us as if we were his own grandchildren. My real Grandfather Pritzker died in the Ukraine not long after the divorce. His son Leo, Mother's only brother, came to the United States in 1905. It was my uncle and his dear wife Frieda who brought me to this country from a Displaced Persons camp in Bavaria in 1948.

My pleasant life of family, friends and vacations in the country or in the mountain resort of Krynica in the Beskidy, and of summer camp with my school all came to a sudden end when the war broke out in September 1939. As soon as the Germans entered the city life for the population became difficult. It was obvious from the start that we Jews were being treated worse than the Christian Poles. Many of the Ethnic Germans appeared wearing Swastika armbands and joined with the German soldiers in maltreating the Jews. Soon we had rations and a yellow armband, later changed to a yellow cloth Star of David identifying us as Jews, making us an easy mark for all sorts of cruelties. Jewish men and women were caught in the streets and made to perform heavy work for the soldiers to the accompaniment of laughter, jeering and beatings. It

became unsafe to be outside even between the curfew hours and not safe inside either as soldiers banged on Jewish doors marked with the yellow star demanding provisions, utensils, bedding, anything they wanted. No one dared to protest because the soldiers were armed and didn't hesitate to beat, humiliate and threaten the occupants. We lived in fear not knowing what would happen next. In the meantime, nightly arrests of the city's intelligentsia, both Jewish and Christian, continued. People disappeared suddenly. Sometimes entire buildings were emptied of Jews to house the many Baltic Germans brought over to Germanize the area.

My Father received a summons from the Gestapo, I think it was early in November. He was arrested in what had been his own office of the newly built modern school that became Gestapo Headquarters. The beautiful new building took years of planning and financing. It was to house the two boys' gymnasium^a and a new building for the girls' school was to be built later on. The arresting officer, a rude and cruel man, sat behind Father's old desk. Father's documents and wedding rings normally kept in the office safe sat in front of him.

When Father was released from the ~~Sperlinga~~^{Spierlinga} prison he had to spend some weeks recuperating in the Poznanski hospital. A few days later a ~~corzka~~^{dorożka} (horse driven carriage) pulled up in front of our house on Magistracka 14. An older white haired man came to inform father that he and two other men were going to head the newly reorganized Jewish School Department. These men were: I. Tabaksblatt who survived the war and worked with Father throughout the Ghetto and Mr. Lew who was older and died soon afterwards. The unexpected guest was Chaim Mordechai Rumkowski chosen by the Germans to represent us, the Jews of Lodz. He was called in the German language "Der Aelteste der Juden". He was called "Mr. President" by the Jews of the ghetto to his face and "The King of the Jews" mockingly behind his back. He had great power over the inhabitants of the ghetto but was just another filthy Jew to the Germans. He was a

megalomaniac and an abusive man who did all he was forced to in the mistaken belief that by working hard, producing all kinds of goods with expert workers he might save some of us. I don't wish to engage in a long discussion of his character and motives. He died long ago in the gas chambers of Auschwitz and I shall leave the figure of Rumkowski to the historians, although I don't think that anyone who was not there can fully understand the utter terror and helplessness of the situation.

For a while we kids from the pre-war schools and all the teachers went to classes whenever and where ever possible, girls in the morning and boys in the afternoon. Eventually the Jaszunska Gymnasium on Południowa Street became our school until we were forced in to the Ghetto. The community was in a state of chaos; nightly arrests, escapes to Warsaw and small towns, daily mistreatment, lines for food and the growing fear of the occupier created panic and confusion.

My family's situation was difficulty. Our savings were blocked in the bank, and all other valuables in the form of American dollars were taken from Father on his return from Warsaw. Many men were urged on the radio to go to the capital to defend it. Soon they came back as the city was burning and had fallen into the hands of the vastly superior German forces. Mother started to barter her china and crystal with the next door Ethnic German lady. She with her family had taken over an abandoned Jewish apartment. Thanks to the fact that she like my mother her viscous little Hitler Jugend ^{son} didn't harass me on the stairway.

In a way it was a relief to go into the Ghetto and away from the constant presence of the enemy. The Ghetto was located in the slum of Baluty, an area totally strange to me, a young protected girl from a middle class family. For the first time in my life I saw small, old wooden houses, smelly outhouses and no running water. We stayed a few night's in my brother in law's

relatives tiny but clean two rooms, where a loom stood idly against the wall. Soon we were given a small room in a house set aside for teachers and school personnel.

In January of 1940 we left our home in the city never to return. Thus began the years of the Ghetto. On April 12, 1940 I was just 14 and on that day ~~as~~ I was walking with friends to cross Zgierska Street to Lutomierska. Suddenly, soldiers appeared and started to put barbed wire to separate the Ghetto street from the main street and street car traffic. I could fill many notebooks, and use many pens to describe life in the Ghetto, but much has been written already. Suffice it to say that this is where I grew up. Luckily for me I had both parents who loved me, took care of me in illness and health, and protected me as much as it was in their power to do so.

We lived in one room, first a small one and later on when the congestion eased through deaths and deportation a larger one in the same building. The brick house on Dworska 14 belonged to the Catholic Church next door, now closed carefully. Before the war this building housed the teachers and priests who taught the young boys living in dormitories near by.

The summer of 1940 saw an outbreak of dysentery due to the poor food and sanitation. Two of my close friend's fathers died quickly. The cemetery filled up with people dying of hunger and tuberculosis and many others diseases cause by malnutrition. Food was scare and of very poor quality, only the additional ration given to highly skilled people and the higher echelon of the Ghetto hierarchy kept the three of us from starving. Not a just distribution of the scant food coming into the ghetto but who could possibly refuse it in the name of justice and fairness when one was starving? Mother performed miracles with turnips and frozen potatoes. She never ate much and lost her considerable bulk but suffered less than father who was thin, sallow and getting weak. She kept the room spotlessly clean and she divided the food taking as little as

possible for herself. I was growing and developing but staying well until I contracted the typhoid epidemic raging in the ghetto In November of 1942.

I attended the clandestine gymnasium, which was closed after about two years. The good days in school, even in the unheated rooms, the camaraderie and optimism of the young were gone. All had to work to avoid being placed on the list of superfluous people and to receive the thin gruel distributed at work. Starvation, tuberculosis and other diseases reigned in the Ghetto; hardly a family was intact. I no longer had the time to read my beloved books. I started to work five hours a day until the age of 15 when I had to put in a full day's work. I helped Father to bring water from the pump and stood in line for the minuscule ration to help mother, who rarely left the house. Thanks to Father's connections she didn't have to appear at work every day and I too was exempt from the worst heavy labor, the lot of people without connections. Father's office was reduced to just the two executives and a few employees.

During the Gehsperre in 1942 my maternal grandmother Chaya was taken with all the weak, sick old and children from the ghetto. The hospitals, insane asylum, and the orphanage were emptied of their occupants who were never seen again. After the war I learned of the killing center of Chelmno, not far from my native city, where hundreds of thousands were brutally murdered. My parents nursed me at home while I lay delirious with fever fearing the hospital since the Gehshperre. Thanks to their care, my good immune system and the medication obtained through influential friends, I got well. I didn't return to the hat factory on Zgieska *Zgierska* where I had been working. But was given work by Rumkowski in a bakery. In the kitchen I ate a little better and was able to recover from the ravages of typhoid. My last year in the Ghetto, that is January to August 1944, I worked in the office and shipping department of a laundry.

I hoped against hope, that we the remainder of the 160,000 Jews who went into the Ghetto, that we ^{the} last 70,000 still alive, among them my parents, friends and a nice handsome boy friend ~~that~~ I was very fond of would somehow survive and together leave Poland for Eretz Israel. We were close but not close enough. When the Russian Army came to Łódź most of us were either dead or dying slowly in the concentration camps.

The final liquidation of the Ghetto began in the late summer of 1944. We tried hiding in Father's office above the police station and went home for the night when the hunt stopped. They hunted us like animals but how long can one hide without bread or water? We were caught on August 16, 1944 and deported to destination unknown. The German leader of the Ghetto, Hans Bibov, promised us that we were going to a better labor camp but who believed him, we no longer believed their lies. We had a chance to join the group left in the Ghetto to clean, pack and ship everything of value to Germany, but as always my dear parents didn't take the opportunity, just as they never took advantage of their several chances to leave Poland for Eretz Israel.

On August 17, 1944 the cattle train stopped after a night's journey. Someone had found a note stuck into a crack. It read in Yiddish "Brothers and Sisters you are going to Auschwitz, death awaits you there." The bolted doors were opened. Burly men in blue-gray striped jackets and trousers called to us to get down. Pavel Klementynowski, a tall boy who was one year ahead of me in school, jumped down first to help us get down safely. The men yelled, "Put down your luggage and form lines in two's, men to the right, women and children to the left". There were not many small children among us, the Gehsperre had taken care of them in the Ghetto. Confused by the shouting, the blows falling here and there, we obeyed. Quickly I sneaked over to the men's line to give Father a small bag with a clean set of underwear and a shirt.

As I stood next to Mother, I remembered he told me during the long train ride that families may be separated, to try to stay with Mother. I turned to Gina Olszer, a young woman I remembered from my work days in the hat factory, and suggested that she walk ahead of me with my Mother while I'd walk right behind them with her Mother, to avoid separation. The lines moved forward to three long tables, an S.S. officer in front of each table. I saw that the young and able-bodied were waved with the flicker of the officers' fingers to the left, but before I could try to understand I was facing the officer on the far left. He looked at Mrs. ^{Olszer} ~~Lifszic~~, a short, gray haired woman, and asked me "Is this your mother?" and I answered "No". He waived Mrs. ^{Olszer} ~~Lifszic~~ to the right, turned to me and asked "How old are you?". I replied truthfully "I am eighteen". He said "You are old enough" and waived me to the left. I understood that he considered me to be old enough to work. I had no time to look to the right to try to fathom what the selection meant because the lines were moving forward. I walked behind Mother and Gina who had a look of utter terror on her face.

The yells, blows, the separation from the men, all had a nightmarish feeling, but I knew that it was not a nightmare and I'll not awaken in my bed in the Ghetto, which now seemed like Paradise lost. We were guarded by very young soldiers, rifles slung over their shoulders. On one side of the road there were tall electrified fences. Strangely dressed women with shaved heads milled near them. Suddenly one called out "Lusia, Lusia, throw me your bread". It was hard to recognize my classmate Misia Klingbeil without hair. She saw the shape of the round loaf of bread I carried in a cloth bag. I threw the bag as high as I could but it fell in a ditch. On the other side of the road, pale, tired looking men were digging. They begged in Polish for bread. As quickly and unobtrusively as I could, I threw my last bread to them.

We entered a large bathhouse and were told to undress and hand over any valuables. I flung my small ruby ring into a corner, and stomped on my watch in anger, not willing to put them in the basket placed on a table by the S.S. guards. There was a strong odor of excrement, a woman next to me had lost control of her bowels in fear. Had I been observed by the S.S., I would have paid dearly for my small gesture of defiance. Young Jewish girl prisoners cut our hair, but for some reason our hair was just cut very short. I hardly recognized Gina whose head was shaved. In shock, she clung to us like a frightened child. Mama gathered us all, embraced and comforted the whole shivering, shocked group. After the cold shower we were given some clothing to put over our naked and wet bodies. My dress was long and green, fairly decent but with a plunging neckline. We stood outside the bathhouse for a while guarded by the Capo girls when a line of men from our transport started to enter. I saw Mr. Klementynowski, Pavel, his younger brother and my Father. I breathed a sigh of relief seeing they passed the selection on the ramp. I never saw my Father again, the Klementynowskis did not survive either.

We walked barefooted till we saw a long line of wooden barracks on each side of the dirt road. In front of barrack number 20 stood a beautiful, teen-age girl dressed in a gay patterned summer dress and red Hungarian ankle-length boots. She opened the heavy wooden doors wide. "Where am I, please" I asked the girl in German. "This is Auschwitz, you are in Hell" said the girl. Hell it was when night fell. Sitting on the hard dirt floor in rows of five, packed like sardines, not permitted by the Capo to move an inch or talk, we all began to beg for water. A short, squat girl of about twenty, dressed in pink silk underwear came out from the blanket covered corner by the entry. She ran along the low, brick oven in the middle of the barrack and yelled at us to shut up least the S.S. would hear, come running and shooting. She said to us;

"Where the hell do you think you are? This is a Vernichtungs Lager (Annihilation camp). Be quiet and obey my commands."

We begged her to tell us what happened to the people waved to the right. She said that they went to a different part of the concentration camp and we'll see them on Sunday. Nothing made much sense but I was exhausted, afraid to think and kept falling asleep sitting up. During the day we sat without moving, allowed to go to the latrine once a day where the S.S. women stood over us yelling to hurry. In the back of the long line of wooden holes we saw men guarded by S.S. men.

It was hot in August in the unhealthy, marshy area. Thirst was worse than hunger. When we were punished for sins never committed by sitting in the burning sun, I fainted several times. Mother and Gina fanned me with their hands, and a Capo took pity on me and allowed me to sit in the shade for a few moments. Though she had power over us she too feared the S.S. terribly. I recall getting a thin gruel one day, a chunk of bread another day but most of the time I was thirsty and bewildered. I saw but could not understand, everything had an unreal quality, it was a world upside-down. I had asked Mother if we were in an asylum for the insane when we stood on the platform, she shook her head no. At the end of the week we were lead from C. Lager to Birkenau. Hundreds of us sat in the grass waiting to be transferred out of Auschwitz to its satellite camp in Germany.

I sat on the grassy earth, next to two young Slovak-Jewish Capos. The sky above me was strangely dark red, huge rings of black smoke coming from somewhere beyond the trees and bushes covering the electrified fence. "It is late evening. The sun has set but why is the sky so red, and where is all the smoke coming from? " I summoned my courage to ask the pleasant faced Capo sitting next to me. She looked at me with amazement. "You mean you don't know?"

she asked. "What am I supposed to know?" I replied. She turned to me and said, "These are your transports burning". Completely stunned I stammered "what do you mean my transports are burning?" "These are the people from the Lodz-Ghetto who were waved to the right on the platform. They were gassed and their bodies are burning in specially built ovens," said the Capo.

Next day two Polish Catholic Capos, Natalie and Sophie, took over. They spoke with kindness and told us we were lucky to be leaving Auschwitz. Their faces and their gentle voices are forever imbued in my memory. They were the first ones to behave like normal human beings in this pit of human cruelty and suffering. The Capos shaved Mother's hair and mine too. Before we boarded the train there was a final selection. Anybody who was thin, weak, or whose features betrayed family resemblance, were told to step aside. Right in front of me my friend Halina's mother and younger sister were shoved aside. We feared the worst, indeed not one of these women was ever seen again.

The long train made many stops disgorging the human cargo in different camps. When the doors were unbolted we saw a sign above the depot building which said "Bad Kudova". Mother smiled, "they knew I was fond of going to a Spa, and they sent me to this famous Spa". Some Spa! The lovely town famous for its mineral waters and baths was located in Germany, very close to the Polish border, and is Polish now.

We, the five hundred Jewish women and girls from Lodz were housed in two large, new barracks. We each had a bunk, a blanket, a dress, wooden or old shoes. Before going to work we were issued a pair of panties, long cotton stockings and a warm coat when it got cold. There was a pump in the courtyard where we were free to drink or take water to wash with, when and if we had the strength after a twelve hour shift. We received a chunk of bread in the evening. A soup made of unsalted, barely digestible, dried-shredded rutabaga was cooked in the camp and

distributed during the break at the plant. The kitchen personnel got fat skimming what fat, flour and potatoes were issued and were too lazy to soak and salt the whole mess properly. I could forgive them the consumption of the scarce food but was angry they couldn't be bothered to cook it properly. The first day when we walked to the factory a couple of miles away, German civilians stood along the sidewalks, mostly women and children. They laughed calling us Affen Frauen, Lumpen Menschen (monkey people, raggedy people). When we entered the huge factory courtyard we saw hundreds of men. Some civilians, Czech and Belgian, Italian and Russian P.O.W.'s and Ukrainians with the sign Ost (East) on their jackets. They stood quietly, not one laughed at us.

The work was hard, we polished or produced air-plane parts. Hunger plagued me all the time. The Italian P.O.W.'s whose songs filled the halls soon realized our situation. We were forbidden to talk to anyone but the foreman and forbidden to go to the toilet without permission but we tried to let the men know as best as we dared to who we were. The Italians began to help although they didn't have much to spare. A short, pockmarked man started to sneak some bread or cooked spaghetti to me. Hunger is greater than fear and I accepted the food gratefully, sharing it evenly with Mother and Gina. He told me in broken German that he is from Rome, his name is Paolo Mongelli. Soon a handsome Italian electrician, Gaetano, took to passing by my machine smiling and giving me encouraging winks. He smuggled a letter to me which one of the women who had studied in Italy read to me. The note contained encouragement, told me that I was worthy of love but the time was not right, that perhaps we'd meet after the war and then talk of love. He signed it "Courage, Cara Lucia". I have never forgotten these two men, their help and recognition of me as a human being while I was being treated worse than an animal, ugly and

humiliated, were as important to me as food, if not more. They lifted my spirits and made me eager to go to work.

The big, coarse S.S. Kommandant of the camp whose name was Lucy took a dislike to my Mother. Was it Mother's fine face, her good German or the fact that she had an attack of gallstones and stayed one day in what passed for an infirmary? I don't know, but Lucy promised that she'd get rid of my Mother and she kept her word. She picked sixty women whom for her own reasons she didn't want and sent us away, in our place accepting sixty Hungarian women. They arrived from Auschwitz emaciated, dirty and broken in spirit. They were plucked from their homes in the spring and summer of 1944, deported to Auschwitz and not having gone through years of hunger and terror were unable to adjust quickly to the cruelties of concentration camp existence. I suppose I could have stayed, even some of the older women I knew encouraged me to save myself as rumor had it that the sixty of us would go directly to the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Much as I wanted to remain in the camp where there was a chance to survive I knew that I couldn't abandon Mother, I simply couldn't have lived with myself leaving her to her fate. I knew I would miss Gina's friendship, the help and friendship of the two Italian's and the camaraderie in the camp. I was filled with sadness and fear of the unknown. Finally we left and after a brief train ride arrived in Graeben, from there on foot to the village of Striegau, both in the area not far from Breslau (now Wroclaw, Poland).

The camp was located close to a big flax factory. Five hundred Jewish girls worked under the supervision of a few German, elderly, crippled foremen, there were foreign-born foremen as well and some Russian P.O.W.'s doing the heavy work. The girls had come from cities and towns in Southwestern Poland before the liquidation of their communities and were not aware of the total destruction. They had their own clothes and hair having arrived directly

from Poland to the German factories. Graeban was a small satellite camp of Gross-Rosen. The Sunday after our arrival two sisters came to meet us. They had heard our names called and realized we were related, indeed Mother remembered their brother who had been a visitor in our house in Lodz. The sisters were in the camp about two years and held important positions. I had hoped that they'd befriend us and perhaps help a bit. Although they greeted us warmly we hardly had any close contact with either one throughout the coming months. Neither Mother nor I knew how to beg for favors and tried to manage as best as we could on our own. Perhaps the sisters found me aloof but in reality I wasn't aloof just sad and withdrawn. Besides Zosia, my bunkmate, I made no friends within my group, nor among the "Old Timers". We were ragged, hairless and new, as always the new are on the bottom. When I tried to tell what happened to the Jews in Poland I was met with astonishment, even anger and I never did it again. I knew they would find out eventually. Mercifully the Jewish camp leader, a tall handsome blond in her twenties, assigned Mother to work in the camp. She was to help a girl in pulling a handcart with supplies from the warehouse in town back to the camp. The supplies were not heavy but the cart was and Mother came back exhausted. She had never been strong since my brother's death. Unlike me the work and humiliation were wearing her down. I was assigned to the Transport Kommando unloading tightly packed bundles of raw flax, wielding rakes to toss the bundles into neat, tall stacks. The work was very heavy and dirty, I thought I would never survive the first day but I learned and became good at it. I worked because we were watched by the S.S. women and foremen who were not loath to slap or use their fists. Luckily there were shower stalls with hot water, a bit of soap and a small towel after work. I showered daily noticing the huge abscesses on many bodies and soon I too had one, caused by lack of vitamins, but never got another painful one. After showering I put my coat over my naked body to stand in line for the

thin soup distributed in the evening, and never caught a cold. Tired, I fell asleep to be awakened by the dreadful roll call. Some Sundays we were loaned out to a local farmer where we worked all day and were given a good, thick soup. Taking a raw carrot or potato was risky but I did it anyway because I wanted to bring something to my Mother.

Christmas and New Year 1945 came and went. We knew that the Russian Army wasn't very far. Again there was a glimmer of hope but it died when one cold dark morning in February when we were told to line up and were marched out in columns out of the camp. On my way to the lines the Jewish Lager Aelteste (camp leader) gave me a round loaf of bread. That bread saved Mother and me from starvation on our march away from the oncoming Russians and freedom. We walked for three days, thirty-five kilometers a day, sleeping in barns. Marching, marching, afraid to linger lest the armed S.S. men shoot. Several times I saw blood in the snow covered roads. Wagons full of German civilians fleeing the Russians, loaded with provisions crowded the roads. Never did any of them ask who we were, never did a hand stretch out with a piece of bread. They looked straight ahead as if they didn't see us on the side of the road.

Row after row of train cars with sides but open on top stood on the sideline in Jannovitz. We, the five hundred girls and the S.S. boarded two or three cars. Men prisoners whose heads were just visible above the top were packed like sardines. The car I was in was attached to the last one filled with men of various nationalities. One Polish-Catholic and one Polish Jew stood at the very end. We conversed freely over the several days of the journey through Germany. They told me that all the Jews in the car were dead and many others as well. The living sat on the dead because the S.S. didn't allow removal of the bodies. They still tried to hide the atrocities they were committing. The suffering of the men surpassed ours. They had been traveling for days without food or water, crowded so that many suffocated under the weight of

bodies. The two Poles were thin and pale, they sang and played the accordion to get a piece of bread from their cruel Gypsy Capo who like to be entertained. This German Gypsy jumped to our car to romance a girl under the cover of a blanket. She was a husky girl, from a small town Orthodox family but wasn't a nice girl at all. I observed her in the camp flattering and trying to ingratiate herself to the S.S. women. How could she engage in this behavior under many eyes, among them her own sister's, with the brutish Capo? I learned after the liberation that she died of spotted typhus shortly after our arrival in Bergen-Belsen. I remember her with disgust and pity.

One night the last few cars stopped. "Raus, Raus," yelled the S.S. men and women, their German shepherd dogs barking. We walked in columns in total darkness. We could barely see barbed wire along the road and then we entered the camp. We stood all night waiting for our turn for the showers. The S.S. men joked that we were still nice and round but ~~it~~ would not be that way for long. We entered a completely empty barrack and sat on the floor. No food was issued for several days. I lined up in the morning to go to work, hoping to get some food. I worked all day in the cold drizzle of Northern Germany. At the end of the long day I carefully hid two sliced potatoes under my armpits. I knew there would be a search but the cruel S.S. didn't find the slices under my arms. He found many a carrot and potato on others less careful and beat them without mercy.

One day when I returned from the fields my Mother was gone. In panic I looked for her and found out that all who were in that barrack were transferred camp number two where lice and typhus raged. I dug a hole under the wire separating the two fields to get to Mother. There I exchanged numbers with a girl only too happy to get away to the better part of the camp. Eventually it didn't matter as typhus reached everywhere, but for the time being she was better

off. The barrack was crowded with Jewish girls from Poland, Hungary and Lithuania. There was a group of German and Ukrainian Gypsies who kept apart from everybody. The "Blokova", the barracks boss and her helpers were Polish Christians. They avoided contact with us as much as possible for fear of catching lice and typhus. For a short time we stood on roll call, however they stopped as soon as most of us were too weak or sick to stand outside. The S.S. were not seen much, they too kept away for the same reasons. Our days were spent killing lice in our clothing. As long as we were well Mother and I fought the plague as best as we could. Water was very precious, only a few of the barracks had washrooms. While I was still well I pushed and elbowed my way to the faucets when the Capos opened the washrooms for a short time. They considered them their property and kept the privilege of washing, cooking, etc. for themselves most of the time. Confined strictly in the stuffy barrack I longed for fresh air. One day during the few moments outside I heard a voice calling Mother's name and mine. It was our neighbor from our building on Dworska 14 in the Ghetto, Dorothy (Dosia) Jakubowicz, a fine and educated woman whom we like very much. She called through the bars of the "Schönungs Block" window "Save me, save me". She was thrown into this barrack for the dying with her sister who was in very bad shape. I saw them when they first arrived in Bergen-Belsen and knew that Henia didn't have long to live. Before we could do anything the Capos hollered for us to go in. We planned to go to this dreaded barrack the next day to plead for Dosia's release to our barrack but when morning came neither Mother nor I could get up from the floor. Mother lay motionless from the start, I was listless and apathetic, and had no strength to lift her or to fight the lice. My body was on fire, lice covered my clothes and stockings, I was horribly thirsty but felt no hunger. Dimly I realized that we both had spotted typhus carried by the lice. How I envied the girl from Radom, Poland whose friend came frequently to sponge her, clean off the

lice and give her some water or gruel to drink. Nobody came to help me, I sat next to my immobile Mother. I don't know how many days or weeks went by. The Hungarian women were first to die, but soon the majority was sick, not only from typhus but dysentery as well. A Hungarian mother lay prone on the floor nearby, her daughter immobile next to her. First the mother died and a few days later the daughter. Soon I too reached the stone phase and sat immobile next to my motionless Mother. In the far recesses of my feverish brain I knew the same fate awaited us soon. I forced myself to go out to the latrine once a ~~do~~^{day} to void. Weak, shaky, barely able to walk a few steps I was afraid to sit on the benches serving as seats surrounding the huge latrine pit and voided on the sandy earth. The Ukrainian woman in charge of the latrine saw me and started to beat me with one hand, the other pushing me into the vile pit. I was slipping into the muck when Bella, my friend Zosia's friend, recognized me and shouted to the woman to let go. "Can't you see she is sick", she said. The brute let go of me suddenly and my wooden clogs touched the muck. With enormous effort, with the last bit of strength I dug my fingers into the dirt and pulled myself up. In shock I didn't feel the pain of the blows though my forehead was bruised.

Mother regained consciousness only once. She said "I am dying, you are young, go to your uncle Leo". She said Shma Israel and fell silent. The "Toten Kommando", or death detail stripped her clothing and dragged her body outside. When I went outdoors I saw her naked, beautiful body, the graying hair curling around her face, the blue eyes closed forever. I wanted to cry but I had no tears. Next day her body wasn't there anymore, tossed onto the mound of dead bodies which was growing fast into a mountain between the barracks. The cold weather gave way a little. I stood outside for a few moments shivering in the chill. I felt like a tiny dot in an immense empty universe, empty of kindness, empty of love, empty of God.

Hungarian Nazi soldiers guarded the camp, the S.S. were not to be seen. We had heard that there was a potato field nearby. I joined a small group in crawling through a hole in a fence because I knew that without some food I would die soon. I was skin and bones, shaking from weakness, my legs were putty. Nevertheless, summoning what little strength I had I ignored the occasional shots and picked potatoes into two small bags. Returning to the opening I was accosted by several healthy, strong Ukrainian girls who preyed on the weak. They grabbed my larger bag. I fell forward on my face, the smaller bag on my stomach covered by my fallen body. The few potatoes saved my life. The girls Rose and Hanna, whom I knew in the camp and who remained healthy, allowed me to cook my potatoes with theirs and then I had no more. One day as I sat watching them boil the remainder of their stash I found a large rotten potato on the ground. I peeled it and discovered that part was edible. The two girls, close friends who helped one another, agreed to cook my half and gave it to me with a spoonful of the warm liquid which warmed my shivering, shrunken body.

A girl lay next to me now. She was one of a set of twins. Her twin had just died, she was sick with dysentery. I helped as much as I could to keep her from soiling herself. The stinking sick with dysentery met with a cruel fate, sometimes not allowed to die in the barrack but shoved outside. I remembered the wild cries of a Hungarian girl who was pushed outside, most probably by the Capos. I didn't need to understand the language to understand the wrath and pain in her voice. I didn't want the twin to meet the same fate and did what little I could for her. She gave me a small cloth with sugar in it just before she died. Typhus and dysentery emptied the barrack. As thirsty as I had been I never drank polluted water knowing it meant a quick, painful death. The tiny body of the twin was still warm when someone called "the Tommies are here". "What

is a Tommy" I asked. British soldiers are here I was told by girls looking through the filthy windows.

Shortly afterwards a man's voice came over the loudspeaker and in many languages told us the British Army was in the camp, to remain in the barrack as food and water would be distributed soon. Then a women's voice singing out the Marseillaise was heard through the camp. Years later I found out this was Fania Fenelon, a French woman who sang even though she was still sick. I sat down on the floor, next to the still warm body of the twin girl and closed my eyes. I knew that I would live but I felt nothing, nothing at all.

My Mother lies buried in a huge mass grave in Bergen-Belsen. My father died of hunger and exhaustion in Dach^{au} on January 21, 1945. My only sister Bella who fled with her husband to the Soviet Union in 1939 chose to stay there. She died in Ekaterinburg in the Urals at age seventy-six. Her daughter Nelli, granddaughter Rada and great-granddaughter Polina are still there as is my sister's aging husband. Of my Father's large family who lived in the towns of Gostynin, Plock, Kutno, and Zychlin, nobody survived.

I came to the U.S. in 1948 from a Displaced Persons Camp in Bavaria where I met my future husband. Leon was also a survivor from Lodz. We were married in New York in September 1948. In 1950 we moved to St. Paul, Minnesota as it was my only uncle's wish that we live near ^{the} ~~my~~ family. Our two sons, Stephan and Jeffrey were born in 1952 and 1956 respectively. Jeffrey, who was a physician, died after a long fight with cancer in 1988. Stephan, his wife Connie and their small son Aidan Joseph live in a suburb of St. Paul.

All I have written is true and accurate. The years have not dimmed my memory, nor did they erase the pain of losing all my loved ones and the tragedy of my people.

